



Government officials with Kaabong, Abim and Kotido district leaders during the launch of the Karamoja Education Declaration recently. Photos by Lawrence Mulondo

KARAMOJA

By Lawrence Mulondo

In 2014, Judith Akullo, 19, dropped out of Loiki Primary School while in Primary Six at the age of 16 after the death of her parents.

Akullo, who was left under the care of her relatives, was married off to a man three years her senior after he paid 25 cows as bride price.

"Getting married was against my wish, I still wanted to pursue my dream of becoming a teacher," she says.

According to statistics from North Karamoja leaders, about 70% of the pupils in the area especially girls, do not complete primary school.

Girls are taken out of school and are married off in exchange for brideprice, which ranges from between 25 to 150 cows.

Conversely, boys are made to rear livestock or do casual jobs on construction sites.

ADRA initiative

To have all children enrolled, retained and complete school in Karamoja, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), a Seventh Day Adventist Church organisation, came up with a crusade to address the above issues.

ADRA started with the North Karamoja districts, including Abim, Kotido and Kaabong.

In 2017, school children in the region were rallied before the area leaders, whom they told the challenges affecting their education.

The issues were compiled in a magazine titled, *The Eyes of Karamoja Children Magazine*.

While launching the magazine in Kaabong in 2017, the Minister of State for Primary Education, Rosemary Seninde, tasked ADRA and other education supporters with bringing the sub-region leaders on board if they are to have all children in school.

ADRA invited district education officers, Inspectors of schools, district chief administrative officers and MPs, among others.

The group then drafted the Karamoja Education Declaration committing to in

Leaders join crusade to keep Karimojong children in school



Lokodo signs the Karamoja Education Declaration as Seninde and Kateregga look on

BETWEEN THE LINES

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order to achieve their dream of 100% enrollment, retention and completion.

Leaders commitment

In the declaration, the leaders committed to ensuring that Karamoja parents are sensitised to keep their children in school until they complete their studies.

They also pledged to fight child abuse, such as defilement and early marriages.

The leaders committed to mobilising resources locally and nationally to support the welfare and education of Karimojong children.

The government organs are also to amend and enforce laws, policies and ordinances



Dinah Laker Okello attending the event with a placard advocating child education

that ensure protection and promotion of children's rights.

The ADRA programmes manager, Solomon Kateregga, said one of their aims is to create a platform where stakeholders make plans and

implement them to improve the education system in Karamoja.

He said this is in line with Sustainable Development Goal number 4 (SDG4), which is about quality education.

"As long as there is a need

to rally parents and leaders to keep children in school, this advocacy programme will continue," Kateregga explained.

He said the declaration is under their Action For Change programme, which is funded by the Danish International Development Agency under ADRA Denmark.

Declaration launch

To affirm their commitment, government and districts leaders appended their signatures to the declaration during its launch in Kaabong district recently.

While officiating at the event, Seninde said there was no way Karamoja would develop if parents did not take their children to school. "Time has come for you to wake up. If you want to get out of poverty, build nice houses, drive nice car and see Karamoja flourish, take your children to school," Seninde said.

She added that the world is now one village and that is why children around the country sit the same exams.

Seninde also expressed disappointment over Karimojong parents who refuse to take their children to school, saying they will become prostitutes.

"I was taken to school but I did not become a harlot. Instead, I am a minister and MP. The only way we can transform Karamoja is by taking girls to school," she said.

The minister also asked parents to take their children to Universal Primary Education schools and pledged that the Government will make sure that they have teachers.

Ethics minister and Dodoth West MP Father Simon Lokodo said education should be a priority because it is the key to wealth and development. "We are leaders,

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Richard Wambi, deputy chief administrative officer Kotido district

There is a lot of abuse of children rights in Karamoja especially access to education.



To stop this, we passed an ordinance where it will be a crime to find a child of school-going age rearing animals during school time. Parents will be arrested and charged.

Rose Okori, Inspector of Schools Abim district



Education in Abim is improving but with a few gaps. Currently, about 14,000 children are ready for Early Childhood Development, but only 2,000 are enrolled in schools.

thanks to education we not gone to school, we would be somewhere in villages languishing," he said.

Lokodo said one should not be proud that their grandparents did not go to school, instead they should break the trend and study.

The minister said although the government policy says each parish must have a primary school and each sub-county must have a secondary school, most of the parishes and sub-counties in Karamoja have no schools.